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In the trenches for Star Wars

By Diana West
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HANOVER, New Hampshire — Robert Jastrow is "a very valuable participant." Robert Jastrow's arguments are "invalid."

Robert Jastrow is "amazingly effective."
Robert Jastrow is "uninformed."

Robert Jastrow is standing in the doorway to his house, at the moment oblivious to the stormy controversy blowing about him, calling to a visitor at the foot of the hill.

"Don't worry about the geese!" he shouts as three sleekly feathered sentries waddle purposefully downhill, beaks open and hissing. "Just come on up!"

So this is the famous Jastrow. Or the infamous Jastrow, depending on one's point of view. This slim, almost lean man with the angular jaw and the sharp blue eyes is to some a hero, to others, anathema.

As the most vocal proponent outside of government of President Reagan's much-vaunted Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), commonly known as "star wars," Mr. Jastrow has been propelled into the center of a squall, the debate raging over the feasibility and desirability of SDI.

Two and a half years ago, Mr. Reagan initially proposed this new strategic vision to the American people, a vision which, if realized, promises to render obsolete the concept of mutual assured destruction (MAD) that has dominated Washington's thinking since the Kennedy period.

Since the beginning of the atomic age, Mr. Reagan's predecessors have been committed to a policy in which the main American deterrent to a nuclear assault by Moscow is Washington's threat to incinerate the Soviet strategic forces and political leadership in a retaliatory attack.

In outlining his hopes for SDI and a means of abandoning the current deterrence of mutual terror, the president called upon American scientists to investigate ways of

defending the United States by putting defensive weapons in space to intercept the Soviet missiles before they reach American soil.

Is such a defense possible?

Yes. No. Maybe. Again, it depends on who is talking. At the very least, it's debatable.

And debated it is.

Talk of SDI ricochets around the Congress and the campuses, the Pentagon and the weapons labs, and its echoes fill the pages of the press. Even Glamour magazine has lately taken it upon itself to poll its readers on the subject.

But one thing that everyone seems to agree on is that the debate goes beyond technical discourse. And too often, charges Mr. Jastrow, the technical debate among scientists is tainted by strategic and political concerns.

Mr. Jastrow's small brown house resting against a grassy hill seems far more than mere miles from the turbulent debate. Muted by thickly overcast skies, the Sunday morning calm of the New Hampshire countryside is barely interrupted by the squawking of the geese. It all feels so removed.

But inside Mr. Jastrow's study all of the most recent newspaper clippings, books and studies pertaining to SDI are strewn about, reminders of the debate he so closely monitors.

"Whenever I tell the story over again, it makes me rather indignant," sighs Mr. Jastrow, settling into a chair. "[The anti-SDI scientists] could do what they wanted . . . but the stakes are so high.

"The Soviets are proceeding with single-minded zeal to build up an arsenal that staggers the imagination. When they have the kind of arsenal that can blanket our military power and cripple our ability to retaliate, then they have us by the throat and they can dictate terms.

"To put a cap on that," he continues, "they're also spending 10 times as much as we are. I learned from a recent CIA declassified report on the 'star wars' research. That's a hard situation in which to swallow opposition to the American 'star wars' effort.

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